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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Bronx Community College (BCC) to compare the academic performance and retention rates of regularly enrolled students with that of Hispanic students involved in the College Discovery (CD) program, which offers academic, career, and personal counseling. The performance of 41 CD students who were enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) 01 in fall 1979 and 1980 was compared with that of 30 men and 30 women randomly selected from students not involved in the CD program during the two terms. Data from student transcripts were used to determine if ESL 01 students could compete academically and socially with the regularly enrolled students. The study revealed that: (1) regular students did not earn higher grade point averages (GPA's) than ESL 01 students for the first two semesters of their freshman year; (2) ESL 01 students earned higher GPA's in special course work than in regular course work during the first two semesters; (3) regularly admitted students earned significantly more "satisfactory" grades than ESL 01 students; (4) regularly admitted students had a slightly higher persistence rate than ESL 01 students; (5) the persistence rate of women, both regular and ESL 01, was significantly higher than that for men; and (6) ESL 01 students tended to select secretarial and technological courses, while regularly admitted students more often opted for business courses. (HB)

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CAN ESL STUDENTS SURVIVE IN COLLEGE?

BY: EMILIO SANTA RITA

This study analyzes the academic achievement of ESL 01 (Hispanic) students admitted to the College Discovery Program at Bronx Community College in the Fall 1979 and Fall 1980.

GPA summaries for the ESL 01 students and a random sample of regularly admitted students showed that ESL 01 students could compete with the latter for the first two semesters of the freshman year. Thereafter, ESL 01 students tended to lag behind the regularly admitted student groups in achievement scores.

Persistence rates among the ESL 01 students have been lower than the regularly admitted students. The rate of academic progress of the ESL 01 students (as measured by "S" grades and number of courses successfully completed) was somewhat slower than that of the regularly admitted student groups. Women, in both ESL 01 and regularly admitted student groups, outperform their male counterparts in achievement scores and have higher persistence rates.

ESL 01 students were more likely than the regular students to major in secretarial and technological studies while regular students were more likely to major in the business curricula. Also there were more undecided among the regularly-admitted student groups.

ESL 01 students' grades in special coursework were higher than grades earned in regular coursework. It was therefore suggested that a block program of remedial and regular course conducted by a team of instructors might accelerate the ESL 01 student's transition into regular college coursework.

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It is widely recognized that ESL 01 (Hispanic) students are not as well prepared -- and generally presumed that they are not as well qualified -- for postsecondary education even among the so-called disadvantaged group. A major goal of College Discovery Program has been to provide college opportunities to the most severely disadvantaged group; the goal has been to show that, with appropriate academic-career-personal counseling and financial support, such youths will be able to succeed in college or university at a level comparable to that of their better-prepared peers.

This research was undertaken to see if this goal was realistic. The study was made to determine if, indeed, with the support provided, ESL 01 students could compete academically and socially in the somewhat alien setting of a college campus where English is the primary language of instruction and communication.

Since the major CD objective is graduation and not merely early success, longitudinal assessment of the achievement of ESL 01 students in CD is necessary. Furtherm re, since ESL 01 students very early compete for grades in degree-bearing courses with regularly admitted students, a comparison of the academic progress of ESL 01 students in CD with the regular students of the college is of value. Evaluation of academic outcomes of ESL 01 students in CD should not be reduced to questions such as, "How many survived for how long?" but to others such as "How do the mean grade levels of ESL 01 students in CD and regularly admitted students compare over time as both groups progress through college?" "How do early college grades relate to later ones?" "Are the characteristics of grade averages for ESL 01 students in CD similar to those of regularly admitted freshmen?" Answers to these questions enable possible recommendations in course development, program development, and in retention practices.

Method

Two entering classes of ESL 01 students at BCC were used in analyzing the input and outcome variables of these students involved in the CD program. In 9/79, 18 ESL 01 students enrolled in BCC under the auspices of CD. In 9/80, 23 new ESL 01 students joined the program. (Spring admissions were not included in this study).

To provide comparison data for the ESL 01 students in CD, random samples of 30 entering freshman men and 30 women not involved in CD program were selected for the corresponding 9/79 and 9/80 classes included in the study.

Achievement data while attending BCC were gathered from the official college transcripts during the summer of 9/81 and consisted of the following:

a. Grade-Point Averages. Calculations were made for the first term, the first year, first two years -- and cumulatively through the Spring 1981 term.

b. Persistence. If the student was not still enrolled, when did he/she leave the College?

c. The number of Satisfactory or "S" grades and the number of Unsatisfactory or "U" grades. Letter grades of A, B, C, and D were equivalent to an "S" grade and F, Wf/Wu were equivalent to a "U" grade.

d. The number of Incompletes or "I" grades that the student received. The "I" (ABS, INC) had been recorded for a course, the transcript contained a record of it and thus it was possible to count the number of incompletes even if they were later changed to a letter grade.

e. Total number of successfuly and unsuccessfully completed credit courses. The number of successfully completed academic courses were those in which grades of A, B, C, and D were received. The number of unsuccessfully completed courses were those in which grades of W, R, and NC were recorded. Only those received during the regular semester terms were counted.

To measure potential differences in academic interests between the ESL 01 students in CD and the non-CD samples, 1st semester transcripts of all students in the study were examined. Because of the relatively small sample of students, the majors were aggregated into the following broad fields of concentration:

a. Business & Commerce (Data Programming, Accounting)
b. Education
c. Secretarial Studies (Executive, Legal, Teaching)
d. Technologies (Eng Sci, ET, MLT, PP)
e. Undecided (LA General)

Results

Grade-Point Averages

Class 1979. Means and standard deviations for each semester's GPA, for the cumulative GPA at the end of 1 and 2 years are shown in Table 1 for men and women in the 1979 ESL 01 and in the 1979 regularly admitted groups. Regular and ESL 01 groups are classifed into subgroups completing the first semester, the first two semesters, and the first four semesters. Grade-point averages are also reported for ESL 01 students' "regular" (degree-bearing) and "special" (remedial) coursework taking during the freshman year:

(a) As indicated in Table 1, for both men and women, regular students did not earn higher GPA's than did the ESL 01 students for the first two semesters of the freshman year. The differences in GPA means between the ESL 01 and regularly admitted men and women samples tended

Table 1. GPA Summaries for Class 1979

	ESL 01 Men Completing Semesters						Special Courses			Regular Courses			Regular Men Completing Semesters					
	1 (N=6)		1 & 2 (N=5)		1, 2, 3 & 4 (N=2)								1 (N=30)		1 & 2 (N=23)		1, 2, 3 & 4 (N =11)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
GPA 1	2.15	.8	2.20	.7	2.09	.6	45	3.35	.9	22	2.87	.9	2.19	.7	2.23	.6	2.24	.6
GPA 2			2.24	.9	2.06	.7	24	3.41	1.05	27	2.34	.9			2.29	.8	2.25	.7
GPA 3					2.01	.8											2.23	.7
GPA 4					2.02	.7											2.19	.7
1-yr GPA			2.11	.7	2.07[a]	.6									2.16	.7	2.24[b]	.5
2-yr GPA					2.08[a]	.5											2.28[b]	.5

	ESL 01 Women Completing Semesters						Special Courses			Regular Courses			Regular Women Completing Semesters					
	1 (N=12)		1 & 2 (N=12)		1, 2, 3 & 4 (N=8)								1 (N=30)		1 & 2 (N=28)		1, 2, 3 & 4 (N=22)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
GPA 1	3.09	.8	3.22	.7	2.20	.6	57	3.31	.9	23	3.01	.9	3.18	.6	3.20	.6	2.39	.6
GPA 2			3.11	.8	2.13	.7	28	3.28	.9	30	2.96	.8			3.12	.7	2.27	.6
GPA 3					2.19	.8											2.26	.6
GPA 4					2.21	.7											2.31	.6
1-yr GPA			3.16	.6	2.16[a]	.5									3.18	.5	2.33[b]	.5
2-yr GPA					2.26[a]	.4											2.45[b]	.4

[a]GPA summaries of ESL 01 Men & Women students on academic probation or academic suspension(reinstated) were included.

[b]GPA summaries of Regular Men & Women students on academic probation or academic suspension(reinstated) were included.

Table 2. GPA Summaries for Class 1980

	ESL 01 Men Completing Semesters 1 (N=12)		ESL 01 Men Completing Semesters 1 & 2 (N=10)		Special Courses			Regular Courses			Regular Men Completing Semesters 1 (N=30)		Regular Men Completing Semesters 1 & 2 (N=26)	
	M	SD	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
GPA 1	2.26	.8	2.24	.8	47	3.42	.8	28	2.93	.9	2.23	.7	2.27	.7
GPA 2			2.20	.8	27	3.44	1.1	19	2.66	.8			2.17	.7
1-yr GPA			2.26[a]	.6									2.27[b]	.7

	ESL 01 Women Completing Semesters 1 (N=11)		ESL 01 Women Completing Semesters 1 & 2 (N=10)		Special Courses			Regular Courses			Regular Women Completing Semesters 1 (N=30)		Regular Women Completing Semesters 1 & 2 (N=28)	
	M	SD	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
GPA 1	3.38	.8	3.44	.7	48	3.56	.9	31	3.17	.9	3.41	.7	3.47	.6
GPA 2			2.96	.8	20	3.38	1.4	17	2.29	.8			2.84	.6
1-yr GPA			2.95[a]	.5									2.91[b]	.5

[a] GPA Summaries of ESL 01 Men & Women students on academic probation were included.

[b] GPA Summaries of Regular Men & Women students on academic probation were included.

to favor the non-CD samples only in the third and fourth semester of the second year.

(b) ESL 01 men and women students earned higher GPA's in special coursework than in regular coursework taken during the first two semesters of the freshman year.

(c) All the first-years means of ESL 01 and regularly admitted men students were above a C average. By comparison, the ESL 01 and regularly admitted women students had a B average or slightly below.

(d) Both men and women in the ESL 01 and regularly admitted groups showed a sharp decline in mean GPA's for the third semester. The decline in mean GPA for both groups may reflect their movement into almost complete regular (degree-bearing) coursework.

(e) Analysis of grade-point data indicated that for most of the comparisons, females did better than the males in both the ESL 01 and regularly admitted groups in each semester of the two years.

Class 1980. Means and standard deviations for each semester's GPA, for the cumulative GPA at the end of 1 year are shown in Table 2 for men and women in the 1980 ESL 01 and in the 1980 regularly admitted groups. Regular and ESL 01 groups are classified into subgroups completing the first semester and the first two semesters. Grade-point averages are also reported for ESL 01 students'"regular"(degree-bearing) and "special" (remedial) coursework taken during the freshman year:

(a) As indicated in Table 2, for both men and women, regular students did not earn higher GPA's than did the ESL 01 students for the first two semesters of the freshman year.

(b) ESL 01 men and women earned higher GPA's in special coursework than in regular coursework taken during the first two semesters of the freshman year.

(c) All the first-year means of ESL 01 and regularly admitted men students were above a C average. By comparison, the ESL 01 and regularly admitted women students had a B average or slightly below.

(d) Analysis of grade-point data indicated that for most of the comparisons, females did better than the males in both the ESL 01 and regularly admitted groups in each semester of one year.

Grade Achievement Data

Table 3 presents means, standard deviations and t-ratios for the college achievement data by class and sex of class 1979 and class 1980 :

Table 3. Grade Achievement Data

	Men							Women						
	Regular			ESL 01				Regular			ESL 01			
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	t	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	t
Class - 1979														
S Grades	30	2.0	1.8	6	.8	1.6	3.26[b]	30	1.8	1.6	12	.6	.6	4.34[c]
I Grades	30	.1	.3	6	.4	1.6	- .94	30	.1	.2	12	.1	.5	- .31
U Grades	30	.5	1.0	6	.7	1.3	-1.08	30	.4	1.0	12	.8	1.1	-1.74
Successful credit courses	30	17.6	6.7	6	14.4	6.4	.96	30	18.0	7.0	12	18.5	6.8	1.05[c]
Unsuccessful credit courses	30	.8	2.1	6	2.4	2.7	-3.26[b]	30	.5	1.4	12	1.8	2.1	-2.94[a]
Class - 1980														
S Grades	30	1.5	3.0	12	.3	.7	2.81[b]	30	1.5	1.6	11	.2	.5	5.68
I Grades	30	.1	.3	12	.1	.4	- .26	30	.1	.4	11	.0	.3	1.24
U Grades	30	.5	.9	12	.5	.8	.17	30	.4	.6	11	.4	.7	- .56
Successful credit courses	30	12.0	3.0	12	8.8	4.2	3.04[b]	30	11.4	6.5	11	10.3	5.4	1.51
Unsuccessful credit courses	30	.5	1.1	12	1.8	2.3	-3.34[b]	30	.4	.8	11	1.4	1.6	-3.45[b]

[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$ [c] $p < .001$

(a) "S" and "U" grades. For both men and women, regularly admitted students received significantly more "S" grades than their ESL 01 counterparts but the ESL 01 students did not have a correspondingly significant higher rate of "U" grades for the four semesters of class 1979. For both men and women, the number of "S" grades did not consistently differentiate the ESL 01 students from the regularly admitted students for the two semesters of class 1980.

(b) Incomplete grades. For both men and women, the ESL 01 and regularly admitted student groups received comparatively the same small number of incomplete grades for class 1979 and class 1980.

(c) Successfully completed and Unsuccessfully completed courses. For both men and women, the ESL 01 students did have a significantly greater number of unsuccessfully completed courses ("R" grades). For class 1979 and class 1980, the trend was for the regularly admitted students to average a greater number of successfully completed courses although the differences were not significant in all cases.

Persistence

Table 4 presents the persistence rates for the ESL 01 students and regularly admitted students based on the last semester successfully completed at the college. The outcomes in Table 4 vary somewhat by year, but in general the regularly admitted students had a higher persistence rate than the sample of ESL 01 students.

Class 1979. About 96% of both groups (ESL 01 and regularly admitted students) completed the first year successfully. Approximately 83% of the regularly admitted group and 73% of the ESL 01 group returned the following term. For the male students, comparable data between the end of their freshman year to the completion of the third semester ranged from a low of 53% for the ESL 01 group to 76% for the regularly admitted group. However, male students in both groups (ESL 01 and regularly admitted students) dropped to a low persistence rate of 33% at the conclusion of the fourth semester. For the female students, comparable data at the end of the second year ranged from 66% for the ESL 01 group to 73% for the regularly admitted group.

Table 4. Last Semester Successfully Completed

	N	Fall 1979	Spring 1980	Fall 1980	Spring 1981
Class - 1979					
Regular Men	30	100[a]	85	76	36
ESL 01 Men	6	100	83	53	33
Regular Women	30	100	100	90	73
ESL 01 Women	12	100	100	93	66
Class - 1980					
Regular Men	30			100	86
ESL 01 Men	12			100	83
Regular Women	30			100	93
ESL 01 Women	11			100	90

[a]In percentage

Table 5. Major Field of Study after the First Semester

Major Field of Study	1979 ESL 01 (N=18)	1979 Regular (N=30)	1980 ESL 01 (N=23)	1980 Regular (N=30)
Business & Commerce	8%	38%	13%	34%
Education	10%	6%	9%	2%
Secretarial Studies	39%	20%	34%	19%
Technologies	36%	20%	31%	14%
Undecided	7%	16%	13%	31%

Class 1979. Students in both groups (ESL 01 and regularly admitted students) successfully completed the first semester at a 100% total retention rate. Comparable data at the end of the freshman year ranged from 86% for both men and women ESL 01 students and 89% for both men and women regularly admitted students.

When the retention rates were investigated by sex, generally the women, both ESL 01 and regularly admitted groups, persisted at a higher rate than men at almost all points in their academic careers. This was not a surprising finding since the women (both ESL 01 and regularly admitted groups) had higher grade-point averages than the males.

Major Field of Study

The data reported in Table 5 are based on the major field of study listed in the students' first semester transcripts. Clearly, the trend was for the the students in the ESL 01 group to select more frequently the secretarial and technological courses than did the regularly admitted students. By comparison, the regularly admitted group tended to lean more toward the Business courses. Also, more regularly admitted students were undecided about their major field.

Discussion

One of the factors only implicitly taken into account in the foregoing analysis is that the ESL 01 students enter college with much weaker academic credentials than the regularly admitted freshmen; and when this factor is combined with their deficit in the English language, significant differences might well be expected.

It should be noted that despite these differences, both male and female ESL 01 students, showed, on the average, a GPA slightly over 2.00 and were able to maintain satisfactory grades throughout their freshman year. In overall grade achievement and regardless of sex, ESL 01 students tend to get lower grades and tend to complete smaller number of academic courses. Despite their lower grades, ESL 01 men are only slighlty less likely than regular men students to complete their second year in college. Poor grades and a strong urge to compensate for failure by "finding a job" might account for the low persistence rates among the men students.

Perhaps the ESL 01 students require more time in which to change, more time in which to develop the study habits and learning sets that could help stabilize their GPA's past the freshman year. It would take some time for these students to acquire the grade-getting dispositions and learning sets that characterize the more successful among the regularly admitted students.

Special coursework grades were higher than the grades earned in degree-bearing coursework. Lower grades in regular coursework cast some doubt on whether grades in the special courses reflect the student's readiness to move into regular coursework. Perhaps external content testing is called for, using standardized achievement scores. Gain scores (rather than "R" grades) would then be a measure of the student's readiness to move into regular coursework.

Alternative practices are being considered for the ESL 01 students in College Discovery. One possibility under discussion is a block program of remedial and regular courses which might provide the extra help needed. This mix of remedial and regular courses will be conducted by a network of of instructors working in collaboration as a team. This team approach would help integrate early the ESL 01 Students' learning experience in special and regular coursework. There will be the usual support system of tutoring and a counseling sensitive to the peculiar needs of the ESL 01 student.

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